

Message Text

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SUBJECT: INTSUM 383 - AUGUST 17, 1977

MOSCOW, KUWAIT, SANA FOR AMBASSADORS

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING

1. EGYPT. PRESIDENT SADAT ISSUED A DECREE ON SUNDAY
DELEGATING ALL PRESIDENTIAL POWERS TO VICE PRESIDENT
MUBARAK WHILE HE RESTS IN ALEXANDRIA AND HIS HOME VILLAGE--
PROBABLY UNTIL THE END OF RAMADAN IN MID-SEPTEMBER.
FOR SOME TIME, SADAT HAS SEEMED FATIGUED AND VERY WORRIED
ABOUT DOMESTIC DIFFICULTIES AND THE UNEASY COURSE OF HIS
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PEACE INITIATIVE; HE PROBABLY WANTS TO TAKE TIME OFF TO
CONSIDER HIS NEXT MOVES.

2. SINCE THE OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES WITH LIBYA IN MID-
JULY, SADAT HAS BEEN ON THE DEFENSIVE IN HIS PUBLIC
APPEARANCES, LASHING OUT AT HIS ENEMIES--LIBYA AND THE
USSR--IN AN UNUSUALLY STRIDENT MANNER. IN PRIVATE, HE

HAS APPEARED TIRED AND HARASSED. AMBASSADOR EILTS, WHO

MET WITH SADAT ON SUNDAY, DESCRIBED THE PRESIDENT AS LOOKING TENSE AND UNDER STRESS. SADAT IS ESPECIALLY CONSCIENTIOUS ABOUT HIS HEALTH AND MUST HAVE FELT HE COULD NOT TOLERATE BOTH THE STRAIN OF FASTING DURING RAMADAN AND THE PRESSURES OF HIS CURRENT DIFFICULTIES.

3. SADAT MAY ALSO WANT A PERIOD OF UNINTERRUPTED TIME TO CONSIDER HIS NEXT STEP IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE, WHICH IN TURN WILL AFFECT HIS OTHER PRIMARY CONCERNS--DETERIORATING RELATIONS WITH THE USSR AND HIS FEUD WITH LIBYA. ALTHOUGH MOST EGYPTIANS STILL SHARE SADAT'S DESIRE FOR A PEACE SETTLEMENT WITH ISRAEL, MANY NO LONGER SHARE HIS SEEMING OPTIMISM AND HAVE TO COME TO CRITICIZE THE WAY HE IS HANDLING THE CURRENT PEACE INITIATIVE.

4. THERE IS MOUNTING CONCERN--OF WHICH SADAT ALMOST CERTAINLY IS AWARE--THAT EGYPT HAS ALLOWED ITSELF TO BE DISTRACTED BY LIBYA AT THE EXPENSE OF ITS EFFORT AGAINST ISRAEL AND HAS GONE TOO FAR IN ANTAGONIZING THE USSR, WHICH WILL PLAY A ROLE IN EITHER MIDDLE EAST PEACE NEGOTIATIONS OR WAR.

5. THE GENERAL PERCEPTION AMONG EGYPTIANS THAT
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SECRETARY VANCE'S RECENT VISIT TO THE REGION FAILED TO BREAK ISRAELI INTRANSIGENCE HAS SHARPENED DOMESTIC PRESSURES ON SADAT. THUS, HE MAY CONSIDER IT NECESSARY TO DEVELOP WAYS OF DIFFUSING POPULAR FRUSTRATIONS ALONG WITH MAPPING OUT FUTURE POLICY.

6. EGYPTIAN LEADERS SEEM AWARE THAT FURTHER FIGHTING COULD--AS IT DID IN JULY--REINFORCE INTERNAL SUPPORT FOR QADHAFI. NONETHELESS, THEY FEEL COMPELLED TO TEACH QADHAFI THE LESSON HE FAILED TO LEARN AT THAT TIME IF FOR NO OTHER PURPOSE THAN TO DEMONSTRATE THAT EGYPT IS THE REGION'S STRONGEST POWER.

7. WHILE WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THE SOVIET UNION WOULD USE ITS POLITICAL INFLUENCE TO PUSH FOR AN EARLY CEASEFIRE IF FIGHTING SHOULD RESUME, WE DO NOT ANTICIPATE DIRECT SOVIET MILITARY INTERVENTION IN THE DISPUTE. MOSCOW MOST LIKELY WOULD ATTEMPT TO KEEP ALIVE ITS HOPE FOR A ROLE IN A FUTURE MIDDLE EAST PEACE CONFERENCE AND FOR BETTER RELATIONS WITH EGYPT BY ADOPTING A POSTURE OF "CONCERNED" NEUTRALITY, WHILE GIVING MORAL SUPPORT TO LIBYA.

8. ALSO, A NEW ELEMENT IN EGYPTIAN-SOVIET RELATIONS IS CAIRO'S SUSPENSION OF COTTON EXPORTS TO THE USSR ANNOUNCED IN SADAT'S SPEECH LAST SUNDAY. THE MOVE MAY PROMPT RENEWED DOMESTIC CRITICISM FROM THOSE WHO BELIEVE HE HAD ALREADY GONE TOO FAR IN ALIENATING THE SOVIETS. SOME EGYPTIANS ARE CONCERNED THAT SADAT, IN HIS EFFORTS TO COURT THE US, IS PURSUING POLICIES THAT COULD ULTIMATELY INJURE EGYPT.

9. MOREOVER, SADAT'S ACTIONS ARE UNLIKELY TO FORCE THE USSR INTO A MORE ACCOMMODATING POSITION. RATHER, THEY WILL PROBABLY LEAD THE SOVIETS TO RECONSIDER THEIR ATTEMPTS AT RECONCILIATION WITH SADAT, ESPECIALLY
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SINCE THEY COME ON THE HEELS OF BREZHNEV'S CALL FOR IMPROVED EGYPTIAN-SOVIET RELATIONS.

10. UNLESS THE COTTON EMBARGO IS MAINTAINED FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, IT WILL BE A COMPLETELY EMPTY ECONOMIC GESTURE. ALMOST ALL OF THE CROP HARVESTED IN THE FALL OF 1976 HAS ALREADY BEEN SHIPPED, AND THE 1977 CROP WILL NOT BE READY FOR SHIPMENT UNTIL SEPTEMBER, MOREOVER, BECAUSE EGYPT NORMALLY SATURATES WESTERN HARD-CURRENCY MARKETS BEFORE LEASING COTTON TO OTHER TRADING PARTNERS, SHIPMENTS TO THE USSR AND EASTERN EUROPE RARELY LEAVE ALEXANDRIA BEFORE MIDWINTER. EVEN IF THE COTTON EMBARGO WERE CONTINUED, LITTLE ECONOMIC HARDSHIP WOULD BE INVOLVED. THE USSR IS BASICALLY SELF-SUFFICIENT IN COTTON, AND EGYPT CAN MARKET ITS COTTON FOR HARD-CURRENCY ELSEWHERE. (SECRET)

11. ISRAEL. REACTION TO THE GOVERNMENT'S NEW POLICY OF PROVIDING "EQUAL SERVICES" TO THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES HAS BEEN GENERALLY HOSTILE AT HOME AND ELSEWHERE. DOMESTICALLY, IT FACED ATTACKS FROM SEVERAL QUARTERS.

(A) DOVISH KNESSET MEMBER ELIAV SAID "THE DECISION IS AN ATTEMPT TO THREAD THE CAMEL OF ANNEXATION AND THE IMPOSITION OF ISRAELI LAW ON THE TERRITORIES THROUGH THE HUMANITARIAN NEEDLE."

(B) HAARETZ CONCLUDED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WANTED ISRAEL TO ABSORB ANOTHER MILLION ARABS, BECAUSE THERE IS NO AVOIDING THE LOGIC WHICH SAYS IF ISRAEL WANTS TO KEEP THE TERRITORIES IT MUST "TAKE CARE OF THE PEOPLE."

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(C) DAVAR SAID IT WAS HARD TO DECIDE WHETHER THIS WAS CREEPING ANNEXATION OR A CASE OF BAD JUDGMENT; WHEN CABINET SECRETARY NOAR OFFERED HIS EXPLANATION THAT "YOU CANNOT ANNEX WHAT IS ALREADY YOURS," IT BECAME CLEAR IT WAS THE FORMER.

12. MANY ISRAELIS COMPLAINED THAT THE PROGRAM PROPOSED BY THE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE TOO COSTLY AND DO NOT WANT TO BE TAXED TO SUPPORT IT. THEY ARGUE THAT THE ISRAELIS ALREADY ARE HEAVILY TAXED, SUFFERING FROM A HIGH RATE OF INFLATION AND BURDENED BY A HUGE DEFENSE BUDGET. OTHER ISRAELIS WORRIED THAT THE NEW POLICY WOULD DRAW THE ISRAELIS CLOSER TO CONFRONTATION WITH THE US. DAVAR CONCLUDED THAT THIS ANNOUNCEMENT FURTHER IMPEDED THE US-ISRAELI DIALOGUE AND THE PROSPECTS FOR GENEVA. "THE DECISION STANDS IN STARK OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT'S DECLARATION THAT EVERYTHING IS OPEN FOR NEGOTIATION."

13. THE ARABS WERE UNIVERSALLY OPPOSED TO THE ISRAELI PLAN. AMMAN RADIO REPORTED THAT THE CITIZENS OF GAZA ANNOUNCED A TWO-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE TO ILLUSTRATE THEIR OPPOSITION TO THE DECISION. REPORTS FROM THROUGHOUT THE AREA INDICATED THAT THE ARABS WERE WAITING FOR A RESPONSE FROM THE US. MOST APPEARED TO AGREE WITH EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER FAHMY, WHO EXPECTS THE US TO PROTEST THIS ACTION OR SHOW US DISPLEASURE PUBLICLY IN SOME OTHER WAY. THE ARAB STATES, HE CONTENTED, WILL BE WATCHING CAREFULLY HOW THE US RESPONDS.

14. THE SOVIETS WERE ALSO CRITICAL OF THE ISRAELIS. TASS COMMENTED THAT THE ISRAELI POLICY WAS OBVIOUSLY AIMED AT ANNEXATION. "THE TOUCHING CARE OF THE TEL AVIV PHARISEES ABOUT THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE LOCAL POPULATION'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PLIGHT REEKS OF CYNICISM," TASS OBSERVED. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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15. PLO. THE VOICE OF PALESTINE SAID THAT THE PLO'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE PLANNED TO MEET YESTERDAY IN BEIRUT TO DISCUSS MIDEAST DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WAKE OF SECRETARY VANCE'S TRIP. PNC CHAIRMAN FAHUM TOLD A WESTERN DIPLOMAT IN DAMASCUS THAT THE PALESTINIANS WERE CONSIDERING THE MODIFICATION OF RESOLUTION 242, BUT THERE

WAS NO AGREEMENT ON HOW IT SHOULD BE DONE. IN ANY
CASE, FAHUM ADDED, THE PLO HAD LITTLE INCENTIVE TO TAKE
ANY ACTION REGARDING 242 SINCE ISRAEL HAD SAID IT
WOULD STILL NOT DEAL WITH THE PLO. FAHUM DID NOT HOLD

OUT MUCH HOPE THAT A FORMULA ON 242 ACCEPTABLE TO THE
US WOULD BE AGREED ON WITHIN THE PLO AT THIS TIME.

(CONFIDENTIAL) VANCE

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